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# State Water Resources Control Board

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**Arnold Schwarzenegger**  
Governor

**TO:** Regional Board Executive Officers

**FROM:** Celeste Cantu  
Executive Director  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE**

**DATE:** JUN 25 2004

**SUBJECT:** GUIDANCE FOR REGULATION OF DISCHARGES TO "ISOLATED" WATERS

### Background

As you know, Governor Schwarzenegger's *Action Plan for California's Environment* directs State agencies to fill any gaps in wetlands protection. The Supreme Court's 2001 decision in *Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (SWANCC)* found that certain "isolated" wetlands and other waters are out of federal jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act, and it is the responsibility of the states to protect them. As a result of the decision, many projects carried out in "isolated waters" that previously would have required a Clean Water Act section 404 permit now no longer need one. From January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2003, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) disclaimed jurisdiction over 160 water bodies comprising 449 acres of waters of the State, including 251 acres of wetlands, 121 acres of riparian area, and 77 acres of other waters (these figures are under-reported because 24 percent of the jurisdictional disclaimers did not specify the sizes of the disclaimed water bodies). USACE continues to disclaim waters, pursuant to relevant federal guidance.

In response to *SWANCC*, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has:

- issued a January 25, 2001 legal memorandum asserting the authority and responsibility of the SWRCB and Regional Water Quality Control Boards (RWQCBs) to regulate discharges to "isolated" waters,
- coordinated with USACE to ensure that the SWRCB and RWQCBs receive copies of all USACE jurisdictional disclaimer letters and developed a database of such disclaimers and related RWQCB orders,
- submitted March 13, 2003 comments on a federal proposal that would have redefined "Waters of the United States,"
- submitted to the legislature an April 2003 report titled *Regulatory Steps Needed to Protect and Conserve Wetlands Not Subject to the Clean Water Act*, and

**California Environmental Protection Agency**